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## THE RESURRECTION FAITH OF THE FIRST DISCIPLES

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The present inquiry is primarily historical in its aim. Moreover, it is limited to a particular item in the history of Christian doctrine, namely, the early belief in the resurrection of Jesus. Hence only indirectly will it have a bearing upon the actual historicity of Jesus' resurrection or upon the place of this belief in modern Christian thinking.<sup>1</sup> But the primitive resurrection faith, whether or not it rested upon any actual historical incident and whatever its proper relation to modern belief may be, was certainly a fact in the history of the Christian religion and merits study as such. Possibly, too, some service may be rendered to modern problems by an endeavor to appreciate the situation of the first disciples as nearly as possible

<sup>1</sup> These aspects of the problem have often been considered. Among recent works, Lake, *The Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ* (1907) discusses critically from a strictly historical point of view all the extant tradition. The various theories of the way in which the traditional appearances of Jesus are to be interpreted, and the literature upon the subject, are summarized by Ryder in the *Harvard Theological Review*, January, 1909, pp. 1-27. To the books there cited one might add Ihmels, *Die Auferstehung Jesu Christi* (1906) and the third edition of Loofs' monograph, *Die Auferstehungsberichte* (1908). Jesus' resurrection as related to the doctrine of immortality is discussed by Fenn and Mackenzie in the *American Journal of Theology*, October, 1908, pp. 565-87.

from their own point of view. Their faith as a factor in the history of religion—its origin, nature, and content—is the center of interest for the present discussion.

The term "first disciples" as here used refers to the early group of Jewish Christians in Palestine, chief among whom were those who had a personal recollection of the earthly Jesus. Most of the number had been his sympathetic followers, but some may not have attained complete faith in him until after the crucifixion. Notwithstanding the unique position which these first Christians occupy in history, tradition gives them only an inconspicuous place. It is not difficult, however, to account for this neglect. The emphasis which the early historians placed upon Jesus' earthly career and the prominence given to Paul and his wonderful missionary enterprise have quite overshadowed the little company whose life bridged the chasm between the two great epochal events in the early days of Christianity: the crucifixion of Jesus on the one hand and the conversion of Paul on the other. At the present time it may be impossible to restore an exact portrait of the primitive church or to estimate fully its contribution to the faith of the first century, but to suppose its life to be insignificant, or at best merely a factor detrimental to the progressive thought of Paul, is certainly not justifiable.

There are several considerations which entitle these pioneers in the faith to claim more attention than is usually given them. In the first place, they possessed the power to survive the experiences of some of the most hazardous days that have overtaken the church. While Jesus was alive he gave stability to the movement he inaugurated, and later the vigorous personality of Paul guaranteed the success of the enterprise he championed, but the transition period could not claim for itself the leadership of any such overmastering personage, nor did the new movement begin with any show of prestige. Had a contemporary historian deemed it worthy of notice at all he doubtless would have termed it a lost cause. As for the new faith in general, its content was not yet defined nor was its power yet vindicated, and it was threatened by seemingly irresistible foes. Yet it lived and prospered, even triumphing over its bitter persecutor, Saul. These earliest believers certainly possessed the secret of Christianity's peculiar vitality.

Nor does their significance cease with Paul. On the strength of his own testimony he appears to have been under many obligations to them: they furnished him knowledge of the life and teaching of Jesus, it was their confidence in Jesus as a deliverer from sin to which he refers as the central thing in his own faith, and it was their testimony to Jesus' resurrection that substantiated the truth which he made the very corner-stone of his Christianity. Furthermore, in various quarters today students are attempting to recover the actual Jesus of history, thinking to find the essence of Christianity in his life and teaching, but this effort meets an immediate embarrassment in which the primitive Christians play the chief part. They are the original custodians of tradition, hence arises the question, Is the Jesus of the gospels the true historical personage or is he largely a creation of the first community? It has been suggested that we may regard as most authentic in gospel tradition that which would not naturally originate with the members of the primitive church. The legitimacy of this canon can scarcely be disputed, but the principal difficulty lies in determining just what would not naturally originate with the first believers. To one it appears quite possible that they and Jesus moved in much the same spheres of thought, while another would put a great gulf between him and them. For example, one tells us that the messianic self-consciousness which the gospels ascribe to him was merely a product of primitive faith, while another believes it to have been the central factor in determining his earthly career; to some the specifically eschatological interpretation of the kingdom of God appears to show the coloring of later elaboration, while others are confident that this is an original element in Jesus' own thought; and illustrations could be multiplied.

In view of the important position which the first disciples occupied and the comparative meagerness of our information about them, it seems appropriate that the initial item in their faith—the belief in Jesus' resurrection—should be examined with some care.

The first Christians confidently believed that Jesus really died, was truly buried, and actually arose from the dead and appeared to his disciples. The testimony of Paul alone is sufficient to convince us, beyond any reasonable doubt, that this was the commonly accepted

opinion in his day—an opinion at that time supported by the highest authority imaginable, the eye-witnesses themselves.<sup>2</sup>

But the exact content of their resurrection faith is not so clear. It has commonly been supposed to have been a belief in the resuscitation of Jesus' physical body. This was capable of ordinary physical manifestations yet it was wholly superior to all physical laws and was able to pass at will into a state of incorporeity, for thus only could it have passed through closed doors or vanished instantaneously from the sight of men whose faculties were in a normal condition. But this representation, taken in its strict literalness, is not altogether satisfactory. The gross blending of the material and the incorporeal as compared with the nobler conceptions of spiritual reality, and certain vague and seemingly contradictory elements in the New Testament narratives themselves, have led many to wonder whether tradition may not have misinterpreted the real occurrence. Perhaps there was no phenomenal event and the first disciples were merely deceived by their own fertile imaginations; or they may have received a reviving touch from the spirit world but wrongly materialized and objectivized its cause; or, finally, they may have comprehended their experience accurately while later interpreters misunderstood its real nature. Any attempt to discover the exact content of their resurrection faith must first determine what preparation they had had for entertaining the idea. On this point there are two lines of inquiry: current Jewish ideas, and the teaching which Jesus had imparted.

Belief in individual immortality, apart from a shadowy existence in Sheol, was a late development among the Hebrews; but by Jesus' day it had been generally adopted except among the Sadducees. In some circles the distinctly Greek conception of the soul's immortality apart from the body found acceptance, but in general it was the Pharisees' belief in the reanimation of the body in a future angelic state that became current. It would be very natural for the disciples, both during Jesus' lifetime and after his death, to expect for the individual—at least for every righteous man—a reanimation of the body when the new messianic age dawned. It is possible, too, that many Jews at this time could have conceived of a resuscitated body's returning to its former earthly existence, though they might not have

<sup>2</sup> I Cor. 15:3-7.

been able to point to a practical illustration of their belief. The possibility, however, underlies the expectation of Elijah's return,<sup>3</sup> Herod's fear that Jesus was John the Baptist risen from the dead, and the assumption made in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. The raising of Jairus' daughter, the restoration of the widow's son, and the marvelous reanimation of Lazarus at Bethany, if not further evidence of the idea's existence in pre-Christian times at least show the ease with which it passed into Christian tradition.

While the return of a deceased individual to his former earthly life may have been thought possible, and while a bodily resurrection to a heavenly state was commonly expected, yet there is no evidence that any Jew would have entertained either idea in connection with the Messiah's career, for it was not supposed that the Messiah was to die.<sup>4</sup> If the disciples during Jesus' lifetime believed in his messiahship they could not have anticipated any such disaster as his death or cherished any expectation of his resurrection, unless they had been previously instructed on this point by the Master himself.

According to gospel tradition he had explicitly, and on several occasions, predicted his death and told them he would rise on the third day. It is not perfectly clear at just what time in his career he arrived at the full conviction that he must die. Though there are earlier intimations, such as his reference to the removal of the bridegroom, it is usually conceded that he did not make a deliberate attempt to prepare his disciples for the approaching calamity until shortly before his last journey to Jerusalem. After Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi there is an almost systematic recurrence of the topic in his reported teaching. What then were the disciples prepared to expect? The gospels present the following situation:

1. Immediately after Peter's confession Jesus is represented as

<sup>3</sup> Elijah's return, strictly speaking, would not be a resuscitation, since he was thought to have been miraculously translated without undergoing death and burial. Restoration to a previous earthly condition, however, is presupposed (Mark 6:15; 8:28; 9:11-13; Matt. 11:14).

<sup>4</sup> This opinion has occasionally been called in question but without sufficient reasons. Even II Esdras 7:28 ff., aside from the question of its source and date, is really no contradiction. Here the Messiah dies not after a life of humility and suffering but after a reign of 400 years, and then his exit is merely an event in the process of a new world-order. The real parallel of Esdras is the book of Revelation and not the gospel history of Jesus.

charging his disciples to keep their knowledge of his messiahship secret. With this incident the first evangelist connects Jesus' first formal prediction of his death, and the others make it the general period of time from which he began to give regular instruction upon the topic.<sup>5</sup> According to the phraseology of Matthew and Luke the prediction was "the third day be raised up," while Mark has "after three days rise again." In this connection Mark alone asserts that "he spake the saying openly," yet there is no hint as to whether his hearers at this time comprehended his meaning. Judging from the implications of the context, they were so slow to believe in the possibility of his death that the thought of a resurrection made no impression upon them.

2. The second formal reference occurs immediately after the account of the transfiguration.<sup>6</sup> According to Matthew and Mark, as Jesus was descending from the mountain with Peter, James, and John, he instructed them that they should not tell of the vision until the Son of man arose from the dead. Luke does not report this saying but simply records the fact that "they held their peace, and told no man in those days any of the things which they had seen." Mark alone makes the significant comment, "they questioned among themselves what the rising from the dead should mean;" although it is Mark who has already told us that Jesus had previously spoken openly upon this topic.

3. Matthew and Mark record a third prediction after the return to Galilee,<sup>7</sup> again using their respective phrases "the third day he shall be raised up," "after three days he shall rise again." Here again Mark says "They understood not the saying and were afraid to ask him," while Matthew naïvely remarks that "they were exceeding sorry." In Luke's parallel there is no explicit reference to the resurrection, but regarding Jesus' statement that "the Son of man shall be delivered up into the hands of men" he adds a threefold comment (*a*) the disciples understood not this saying, (*b*) it was concealed from them, (*c*) they were afraid to ask him about this saying.

4. The fourth occasion on which Jesus foretells his death and

<sup>5</sup> Mark 8:30-32; Matt. 16:20 f.; Luke 9:21 f.

<sup>6</sup> Mark 9:9 f.; Matt. 17:9; Luke 9:36b.

<sup>7</sup> Mark 9:30-32; Matt. 17:22 f.; Luke 9:43b-45.

resurrection is recorded by all three evangelists,<sup>8</sup> and assigned by Matthew and Mark to the days of the final journey to Jerusalem. Here Jesus predicts somewhat in detail the course of events to be followed at his trial, but the reference to the resurrection is merely a repetition of each evangelist's characteristic phrase, Luke following Mark. Here Luke adds another conflate comment (*a*) they understood none of these things, (*b*) this saying was hid from them, (*c*) they perceived not the things that were said.

It will be observed that all these direct references of Jesus to his resurrection are categorical in character, their contexts betray no effort to domesticate an idea radically new to the mind of the hearers, they lack the lifelike freshness of Jesus' customary discourses, and the recurring phrases show a tell-tale literary similarity. It might be overbold to assume that these sayings are insertions of an evangelist at those points where it seemed to him that Jesus must have given some intimation of the approaching event; but tradition is unquestionably emphatic in declaring that Jesus, if he made any effort whatever to create the expectation of his resurrection, was not successful in the attempt.

5. There are other passages which indirectly assign to Jesus a prediction of his resurrection, but they are of doubtful authenticity. According to the first evangelist only, this was Jesus' meaning when he spoke of the sign of Jonah,<sup>9</sup> and it was the Jews' excuse for requesting a guard for the sepulcher.<sup>10</sup> The angelic communication to the women who found the tomb empty implied that Jesus had forewarned his disciples.<sup>11</sup> In the narratives of Matthew and Mark, though their phraseology varies slightly, Jesus was accused at his trial of having spoken of the destruction of the temple and a reconstruction in three days,<sup>12</sup> but there are no grounds for making this a reference to the resurrection, except for the explanatory comment of the Fourth Gospel in a different context.

6. Lastly, one may call into evidence an array of passages which definitely state or indirectly imply the expectation of Jesus' second

<sup>8</sup> Mark 10:32-34; Matt. 20:17-19; Luke 18:31-34.

<sup>9</sup> Matt. 12:40; cf. Luke 11:30.

<sup>10</sup> Matt. 27:63.

<sup>11</sup> Mark 16:7; Matt. 28:6; Luke 24:6 f.

<sup>12</sup> Mark 14:58; Matt. 26:61; cf. Mark 15:29; Matt. 27:40; Acts 6:13 f; John 2:21.



coming. These clearly intimate that he did not think his death would end all, and he seems to have sought to inspire in his disciples the same conviction. Some interpreters are inclined to put great stress upon this teaching of a second coming, even going so far as to say that otherwise it would be impossible to explain how the disciples came to be able to believe in the resurrection.<sup>13</sup> According to this view these prophecies are more important than the definite predictions that he would rise in three days. Thus belief in the resurrection was ultimately derived from that confidence in his messiahship, interpreted eschatologically, which Jesus during his lifetime had inspired in his followers. Possessed by this conviction and impressed by the memory of his worth, their ecstatic temperament, working upon their highly overwrought nerves, so electrified their vivid imaginations that they were able to create for themselves a firm belief in the risen Christ.

This hypothesis is not altogether satisfactory. In the first place we do not know positively how much stress Jesus placed upon the prospect of his visible return. A large amount of his reported teaching represents the coming of his kingdom as a gradual development in the hearts and lives of men. On various occasions he took no small pains to correct current erroneous notions of the character of his mission. His followers looked for external display, and anticipated a personal share in the glories of the new messianic age, while he sought to teach that the members of his kingdom were to be controlled by the spirit of service; and with this conviction he was able to be reconciled to his death. Possibly he anticipated a miraculous vindication of his claims in the future when he would come upon the clouds, and so taught his disciples, but in the gospel picture of him the sober sanity of his message is quite as pronounced as are the traits of the apocalyptic visionary. Moreover, the thought of the early community was apocalyptic to the core, hence it would not have been at all strange for the stream of gospel tradition to gather to itself discoloration from the banks past which it first flowed. And though the disciples, while Jesus was with them, were expecting the kingdom to be brought to its consummation by his sudden appearance in heavenly majesty, the expectation did not logically involve his death and resurrection.

<sup>13</sup> So Schmiedel, *Encyc. Bibl.*, Vol. II, art. "Gospels," § 145 (f), and Vol. IV, art. "Resurrection- and Ascension-Narratives," § 37 (b).

They were living in an atmosphere aquiver with miraculous possibilities and perhaps never asked how the earthly Jesus of today was to become the heavenly Christ of tomorrow. At any rate his death was not regarded as a step in the process, for when he admitted his messiahship and then spoke of his approaching death Peter called him to account at once for not better understanding the messianic programme. And even granting that Jesus may have clearly intimated to his followers that the kingdom was to be ushered in by his appearance upon the clouds, congenial as this idea would have been to their minds, there is no historical evidence that they ever reached the point during his lifetime where they accepted his revised form of the Messiah's schedule, which admitted the possibility of his death.

So far as the gospel records warrant any conclusion Jesus' prophecies of a second advent had not been successful in leading a single disciple to expect his resurrection, and whatever may be said of any teaching of his that may have given the disciples some premonition of the future event, we must concede that it had not produced expectancy. There is not anywhere the slightest intimation that any one of his followers cherished the faintest hope. If we are to understand their resurrection faith we should approach a study of the period in which it was produced as free from mental prepossessions regarding it as they were on the day of Jesus' crucifixion. Neither their inheritance from Judaism nor the instruction they received from the earthly Jesus opens to us the secret of their new faith. This was a conviction born of their later experience and based primarily, according to all the available evidence, upon those manifestations of himself which the risen Lord made to them. What, then, was the content of their new experience?

Paul's account of the appearances is the briefest and yet the most comprehensive.<sup>14</sup> They are six in number, and seem to be enumerated in the order of their occurrence. The first was to Peter, the second to the Twelve, the third to above five hundred brethren at once, the fourth to James, the fifth to all the apostles, and the sixth to Paul himself. These statements are made without the least hesitation and in the full confidence of one who possessed the evidence. The last one was

<sup>14</sup> I Cor. 15:5-8.

certified to by the writer's own experience, and the others were given on the authority of the chief eye-witnesses who were still living. Unfortunately the apostle does not explain the nature of these appearances, nor does he give any particulars connected with them; but he evidently regarded his own vision of the risen Christ to be essentially the same as that which the others had experienced. He nowhere describes exactly what he saw, so we are left largely to inference based upon his treatment of the subject of resurrection in general.

But his language to the Corinthians<sup>15</sup> is very suggestive. To meet their peculiar needs he must do two things: first, demonstrate that the dead will be raised (vs. 12); second, show with what manner of body they will rise (vs. 35).<sup>16</sup> Of course as a Pharisee Paul believed in bodily resurrection before he believed in Christ, and the Corinthians may have held that abstract idea of immortality native to Greek thought, but as Christians Paul and they had a common meeting-ground in the historic fact of Christ's resurrection, and to this, therefore, the apostle makes his sole appeal. He so far puts Christ on a level with humanity as to say, if dead men do not rise then Christ has not been raised;<sup>17</sup> and, conversely, if Christ has been raised then dead men do rise.<sup>18</sup> Now God has raised Christ, therefore he will raise men, particularly those who live a life of fellowship with the risen Lord. As the death of the first Adam was typical of the fate that awaited all other men, so the resurrection of the second Adam was prophetic of every man's future hope. Thus the whole proof of man's resurrection rests upon the fact of Christ's resurrection.

<sup>15</sup> I Cor. 15:12-54.

<sup>16</sup> This was long a moot question among gentile Christians, for the Hebrew idea of a restored body was not congenial to Greek thought. In the Apocalypse of Peter this perplexity is seen in the disciples' question: "Show us one of our righteous brethren who has departed from the world in order that we may know what sort of form they have;" and Justin, in defending the doctrine of a millennium, refers to certain ones who called themselves Christians and yet said there was no resurrection but the soul at death ascended at once to heaven (*Trypho*, lxxx). Ultimately Christianity absorbed both the Greek and the Hebrew conceptions: the former in the doctrine of the soul's immediate ascent to heaven after death, and the latter in the belief in its reunion with the resuscitated body in the indefinite future (cf. Knopf, *Die Zukunftshoffnungen des Urchristentums*, pp. 39 ff.). But in Paul's time the issue was a new one and called for greater attention on his part than we are apt to appreciate.

<sup>17</sup> I Cor. 15:13, 15 f.

<sup>18</sup> I Cor. 15:12.

It is sometimes urged that Paul did not know the tradition of the empty sepulcher, or did not accept it as authentic, else he would have mentioned it in this connection; he could not have passed over so weighty an argument.<sup>19</sup> But this is not a necessary inference, and even its legitimacy seems doubtful. It was characteristic of Paul's dialectic not to cite hearsay evidence when he was able to mete out first-hand knowledge. On the question of Jesus' resurrection he regards himself a competent authority, consequently he mentions only by way of preface the authentically attested accounts of the post-resurrection appearances, and when he reaches the real argument it is the authority of his own knowledge alone to which he makes appeal. He tells them that he has himself seen the risen Lord, and the vital question is, Do they believe the truthfulness of his statement? They ought to believe it, he says, for he gives his testimony fully conscious of its sacred character, and if it is not true he is deliberately a false witness regarding the work of the Almighty (vs. 15). Surely they cannot think him guilty of so blasphemous a deception. And if they are not convinced by his solemn declaration, his conduct ought to be proof positive of his sincerity: he preaches a gospel which depends upon Christ's resurrection for its validity, his practice of baptizing for the dead further attests his belief, and the sturdy willingness with which he jeopardizes his life for the cause he advocates should be conclusive evidence to them of the honesty of his conviction. If he thus testified, both by word and deed, to his own positive knowledge there could be no stronger evidence adduced. He might tell of what others had seen that agreed with his own experience, but other evidence about which he had only hearsay information, as must have been the case regarding the account of the empty tomb, would have been of only inferior worth. For those to whom he claimed the supreme right of apostleship<sup>20</sup> the strongest grounds of certainty would have been his personal knowledge of the fact, in the second place would be put other information that corresponded with his, and lastly would come such knowledge as he might claim on second-hand authority only. Hence a mention of the empty sepulcher in his dis-

<sup>19</sup> E. g., Schmiedel, *Encyc. Bibl.*, Vol. IV, art. "Resurrection- and Ascension-Narratives," § 15.

<sup>20</sup> I Cor. 9:2.

cussion with the Corinthians would have been a matter of only third-rate worth at best. His failure to mention it is therefore not sufficient evidence that he was either ignorant or skeptical at this point. We shall not know whether Paul held the idea or no, except as it may appear to be a logical inference from his doctrine of bodily resurrection in general.

The only particular in which he makes the resurrection of Christ differ distinctly from that of other men is the time of its occurrence—Christ is the “first-fruits.” Paul may have had some peculiar theory of a relation between this and man’s deliverance from sin, and possibly he believed it would exert some mystical influence in bringing about the resurrection of men, but these are dogmatic considerations which stand entirely apart from his doctrine of the nature of a risen body. We need here only to observe how close is the likeness which he draws between Christ and men and how far he answers his second main question, With what manner of body do the dead arise?

He does not regard the resurrection as merely a revivification of the physical body,<sup>21</sup> nor does he speak of rising from the grave but rather from the dead, that is, from the underworld. This is an inheritance from Judaism which conceived of the spirit as lingering in the vicinity of the body for three days, then descending to the lower world to await a reunion with the resuscitated body at the end of the age. So in general Paul speaks of the raising of dead persons rather than the raising of dead bodies. He also makes it very clear that the individual in this new state is not clothed with flesh and blood but with a spiritual corporeity, incorruptible, glorified, heavenly. But when we ask him for his opinion of the relation, if any, which the new heavenly body bears to the material body of earth he has no decisive answer. The two are radically different, but are they mutually exclusive? Does he think the risen spirit reinhabits the old body purged of its corruptibility, its dishonor, its weakness, its earthly qualities, and surcharged with, and enveloped by, a glorious heavenly essence; or does the spirit personality ascend to its new abode in utter abandonment of its former earthly tabernacle? In attempting to force from Paul an answer to this question his would-be interpreters are in grave danger of becoming misinterpreters, for

<sup>21</sup> I Cor. 15:45-49; II Cor. 5:1-8; Rom. 6:5-11; Eph. 1:18-2:6; Phil. 3:8-11.

he has made no final pronouncement upon this problem. If he followed the leading of his Pharisean thought he could easily have believed in the miraculous transformation of the earthly into the heavenly, the corruptible putting on incorruption and the mortal putting on immortality; but if he showed greater deference for Greek thought, as he may have been inclined to do when writing to the Corinthians, he may have granted an utter dissolution of the earthly tabernacle and the creation of an entirely new heavenly abode.<sup>22</sup>

As for his view of Jesus' risen body, it seems safest to suppose that he followed his Jewish habit of mind, and so believed the tomb had been left vacant by a miraculous transformation of the earthly body. This would have been the most natural opinion for him to entertain when it was first reported to him that Jesus had arisen and appeared to his followers, and it would be further enforced by the short lapse of time since death, which had not been sufficient to effect a dissolution of the body, for Paul accepts the statement "he hath been raised on the third day;" and while he usually speaks of an arising from the abode of departed spirits, he says explicitly of Jesus: "He was entombed (*ἐτάφη*), and hath been raised." But it would be a mistake not to notice how supremely Paul emphasizes the spiritual reality of his risen Lord's existence. Whether this existence had its basis in the reanimation of a former physical habitat, or whether the new form of being was completely independent of the old, were probably questions to which he gave only secondary attention. Whatever the solution, the answer did not affect the vital truth; the Lord lives and because he lives we know we shall live also.

What, then, is the sum of Paul's testimony to the primitive resurrection faith? He is not a wordy witness but a weighty one. He gives almost nothing in detail. He does not locate the scene of the events, nor does he tell how long a time intervened between the resurrection and the first appearance; we are not positively certain that his enumeration of the appearances is intended to be comprehensive rather than representative; and that the disciples' vision of their

<sup>22</sup> Cf. II Cor. 5:1 ff. As this idea seems to be more strongly emphasized in his second letter, some have supposed his thought gradually developed in this direction (see R. H. Charles, *Eschatology*, pp. 397-403). This may have been a concession to the Greeks who naturally regarded all flesh irredeemably bad, but for Paul mere flesh was not inherently evil.

risen Lord was the initial factor in establishing their resurrection faith cannot be positively affirmed though it is strongly suggested both by the implications of Paul's language and by the analogy of his own conversion experience. Notwithstanding these uncertainties, in some of the very essential features of the tradition his language is perfectly clear. He leaves not the slightest doubt as to the early date of the new faith. When he embraced Christianity, which according to some reputable chronologists was scarcely more than a year after the crucifixion, it was commonly accepted that Jesus had been buried, that he was raised on the third day, which for Jews implied belief in an empty tomb, and that he afterward appeared to men on several occasions. The body of the risen Christ, judging from the discourse to the Corinthians, was like the bodies of risen men, no longer material and earthly but spiritual and heavenly, and, on the analogy of Paul's own vision, the visions which other men had of the risen master, while objectively real, were primarily attestations of his living supremacy in the realm of the spirit.

Turning now to examine the testimony of the gospels we find the situation more perplexing. Details are presented much more elaborately but direct acquaintance with the facts is less in evidence. We ignore the manifestly apocryphal legends outside the canon<sup>23</sup> and confine our study to the New Testament sources of information.

It is felt by some critics that the accounts which now stand at the close of our gospels are of so late and legendary a character that the more original resurrection story is to be sought in some other part of the tradition. Wellhausen,<sup>24</sup> for example, would find it in the account of Jesus' transfiguration.<sup>25</sup> He thinks the "mountain" is probably the same as that mentioned in Matt. 28:16, the declaration of the heavenly voice agrees with Rom. 1:4, which states that Jesus was declared through the resurrection to be the Son of God with power, and the appearance of Moses and Elijah is especially significant in that they too had ascended immediately from the earthly to the heavenly life and were not in Sheol as all other men were. With

<sup>23</sup> These are noted by Lake, *op. cit.*, pp. 148-65; and more fully by A. Meyer, *Die Auferstehung Christi* (1905), pp. 59-84.

<sup>24</sup> *Das Evangelium Marci* (1903), p. 77.

<sup>25</sup> Mark 9:2-13.

this interpretation the reason for the mention of a six-day period between Peter's confession and the transfiguration becomes clear: it is the interim between the end of Jesus' life in Jerusalem and his appearance in Galilee. So he was immediately removed to heaven after his death—an idea which is not contradicted by Mark, chap. 16. Moreover, it is not in the act of resurrection, but in the subsequent condition, that the risen one appears transfigured before the three disciples. Since Paul makes the first appearance to Peter alone, possibly Peter's confession was the initial step in the establishment of the resurrection faith. If the above hypothesis is correct the witness thereby furnished for the primitive faith is meager, but it conforms, so far as it goes, to the testimony of Paul.

Kreyenbühl has recently advocated a still more fanciful theory.<sup>26</sup> He agrees that the transfiguration is an early resurrection narrative, but not the oldest. That is to be sought in the account of Jesus' walking upon the sea.<sup>27</sup> The starting-point of the new faith was Simon's own soul. After his return to Galilee, reflecting upon the unique life of Jesus and cherishing the Jewish hopes of the time, he became certain of Jesus' messiahship and consequently certain of his exalted station. Side by side with this conviction there was the popular fear of a dead person's ghost. To see ghosts was characteristic of that age, and there was nothing unusual in the disciples' having such visions of Jesus. But these experiences produced fear rather than hope, until Simon's higher faith triumphed over the ghost-fear; and the original of Matt. 14:22-33 told in figurative language how he gained this victory. When it says he saw the wind it can only mean (since wind is always invisible) that he saw the ghost. The sea almost engulfed him, but his higher faith ultimately conquered and the wind (the ghost-fear) ceased. He then proceeded to help his companions to a similar confidence. He exhorted them not to fear the ghost, saying, "Hear ye him;" and thus, in the second place, we have the original kernel of the transfiguration story. These two incidents stood at the close of the primitive gospel of the first

<sup>26</sup> "Der älteste Auferstehungsbericht und seine Varianten" in *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, IX, 4 (November, 1908), pp. 257-96.

<sup>27</sup> Matt. 14:22-23 comes nearest to the original story. The stilling of the tempest (Matt. 8:23-27) is a still later variant of the same.



community and they were the only tradition of the resurrection contained in that document.

That the description of the transfiguration has been colored by the later resurrection faith is not impossible, even if it is not assumed to be itself originally a resurrection narrative.<sup>28</sup> It is therefore permissible to note it in this connection, but the rest of Kreyenbühl's thesis is too purely imaginative to be worth anything as a guide in the study of the primitive faith. Nor are the results reached through the suggestions made either by him or by Wellhausen so definite that a further search of the gospels is unnecessary, hence we must examine those passages which purport to relate the appearances of Jesus, through which, according to the tradition, the faith of the disciples was established.<sup>29</sup>

Mark's account is fragmentary, there being no trustworthy manuscript authority for anything beyond the eighth verse of the final chapter, but the part that is preserved contains the promise of a minute description. Three women set out to anoint Jesus' body, arriving at the tomb at sunrise on the first day of the week. They find the large stone that sealed the tomb already rolled away, they enter and find a young man clothed in white who tells them that Jesus is risen, and they are commanded to tell the disciples and Peter: "He goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you." The women leave the tomb but being afraid say nothing to anyone.

Matthew's account resembles Mark's, but has some heightening of color. Late on the last day of the week two women set out not to anoint the body of Jesus but simply to see the sepulcher. Accompanied by an earthquake an angel descends from heaven, rolls away the stone, and sits upon it. He tells the visitors that Jesus is risen, and commands them to tell the disciples (no mention of Peter): "He is risen from the dead (not in Mark); and lo he goeth before you into Galilee, there shall ye see him: lo I have told you" (instead of Mark's "as he said"). The women leave the tomb with fear and joy, and run to tell the disciples. As they go Jesus meets them, they embrace his feet, and he says: "Go tell my brethren that they depart

<sup>28</sup> Cf. H. J. Holtzmann, *Die Synoptiker* (1901), p. 86, and Bacon, "The Transfiguration Story," *American Journal of Theology*, April, 1902 (especially p. 259, n. 29).

<sup>29</sup> Mark 16:1-8; Matt. 28:1-20; Luke 24:1-53; John 20:1-29; 21:1-14.

into Galilee and there shall they see me." The eleven went to an appointed mountain, and there Jesus appeared and gave them the well-known great commission.

In Luke the report is still further elaborated, including new if not different tradition. At early dawn on the first day of the week a company of women who had followed Jesus from Galilee visit the tomb. Finding the stone rolled away they enter. Thereupon two men "in dazzling apparel" appear and say: "Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee," and then follows a repetition of the words in which he had recently predicted his death and resurrection. The women depart and tell all these things "to the eleven, and to all the rest;" but their report is not believed. Then Peter visits the tomb alone, finds no one, and departs to his home wondering; but the manuscript attestation for this incident is doubtful. A later reference (vs. 24) in which the reading is certain, reports that some of the company visited the tomb after receiving the news from the women. The same day Jesus appears to Cleopas and the other disciple on the way to Emmaus, where he makes himself known to them in the breaking of bread at the evening meal and then suddenly vanishes from their sight. They immediately return to Jerusalem to relate their experience, and find the disciples there reporting that the Lord has arisen and appeared to Simon. While they are conversing Jesus stands in the midst and says: "Peace be unto you." They are afraid, thinking they see a spirit, but he quells their fears by calling attention to his flesh and blood, and also to his hands and feet; and further to dispel their doubts he eats a piece of flesh in their presence. Then he opens their minds that they may understand the scriptures that refer to him, and finally he charges them to wait in Jerusalem for the outpouring of the spirit. Then they accompany him on the way to Bethany, where he leaves them. The same author in Acts asserts, without specifying particulars, that Jesus continued for forty days to appear to his disciples and to teach them concerning the things of the kingdom.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Acts has several references to appearances of Jesus (e. g., 1:1-14; 7:55-59; 9:1-9; 22:6-10; 26:12-18; cf. 2:24-29) but these do not call for special comment. The author was not able in his second treatise materially to supplement the information he had given in the gospel.

According to the narrative of John, Mary Magdalene alone comes to the tomb before daylight on the first day of the week, and seeing the stone removed, without further examination, hastens to Simon and "the other disciple whom Jesus loved," saying: "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we know not where they have laid him." The two disciples then run to examine the sepulcher and find it empty, whereupon they return to "their own home" not yet suspecting that Jesus has arisen. Mary again appears and while weeping before the tomb sees two angels within, and on turning away she meets Jesus but mistakes him for the gardener. He speaks and reveals his identity but does not permit her to touch him, and she reports her experience to the disciples. On the evening of the same day he appears to the disciples within closed doors saying: "Peace be unto you," showing them his hands and side. Then he breathes the Holy Spirit upon them. Thomas was absent at this time and refused to believe except he should see for himself, consequently eight days later Jesus grants them a repetition of the former experience. Then follows another appearance, undated, at the sea of Tiberias, where seven of the disciples were fishing. In the morning they find Jesus on the shore, instructed by him they take a miraculous draught of fishes, he then serves them with breakfast but does not partake himself, and finally he commissions Peter to feed his sheep.

An examination of the gospel details is disappointing to one who is seeking reliable information regarding particulars. Many of the items mentioned are materially different, if not indeed mutually contradictory. The number of women who visit the tomb is variously represented from a whole company to only one; the time of their arrival is the evening of the last day of the week,<sup>31</sup> before sunrise and after sunrise the first day; they witness the removal of the stone, and the stone is already removed when they arrive; they enter the tomb, and they do not enter; they converse with only one angel, and with two; they are ordered to report to the disciples, and they are not so directed; they are said to have reported immediately, to have gone to report, and not to have reported at all; they see Jesus and touch him, he is seen but not touched, and he is not seen; the disciples are

<sup>31</sup> The phrase *ὅψε σαββάτων* is usually rendered "late on the sabbath," but it may mean "after the sabbath" and so agree with Mark 16:1.

made to see him in Galilee only, in Jerusalem only, in Jerusalem first and in Galilee later; they are to wait for the spirit, and they are given the spirit immediately; the ascension precedes the appearances to the disciples, does not occur until after the appearances, and is not thought of at all as a distinct event.

Of course trustworthy narratives may sometimes differ in non-essentials, but here there are elements about which eye-witnesses could scarcely have varied so widely; for example, whether there were several women or only one who visited the tomb, whether they found the stone removed or witnessed its removal, whether they reported to the others or kept silence, whether the disciples went to Galilee or remained in Jerusalem, and the like. We must conclude that the gospel-writers were basing some portions of their narratives not upon sources furnished by eye-witnesses but upon reports that had circulated long enough to gather divergent elements in the course of transmission. It is only natural, too, that there should be a good deal of variation in the reported proceedings of these strange days, particularly in narratives that received their present literary form from thirty-five to seventy years after the events. The subject itself was one that invited the free play of pious imagination and forbade sober exactitude in description. According to Paul's testimony many different persons had seen the risen Lord, and each at some time may have reported his own impressions. Moreover, as Christianity became a missionary religion it found itself compelled to phrase its ideas to meet local needs and to correct the errors of erratic fancies. It is therefore easy to imagine how a gospel historian, when he set to work to write an account which he conceived to be self-consistent, and at the same time adequate to the needs of his own date and circumstances, should have incorporated a number of details that would not withstand the application of exact historical tests.

It is noticeable, too, that the divergences are not due to the exhaustive character of the reports. For instance, Matthew records but two appearances, one to the women and one to the eleven in Galilee; the fragment of Mark leads us to expect only one; Luke describes two, one on the way to Emmaus and another to the company on the same evening in Jerusalem, and merely mentions an earlier one to Simon; John describes four, one to Mary in the garden, two to the

disciples in Jerusalem, and one in Galilee. The first one of John and the first of Matthew seem to represent the same original; the second of John and the second of Luke are identical in time, they represent the same general situation, and probably are derived from the same tradition. The other five, the one to Simon, the one on the Emmaus road, the one for Thomas' benefit, and the two in Galilee seem to stand alone; and excepting the appearance to Peter there is no convincing proof that the instances so well known to Paul are represented by any of these. Indeed the evangelists were not especially well informed regarding the events of this obscure period, or else in the selection of their material they were guided by their fancy rather than by any aim to report comprehensively. If each could be considered absolutely trustworthy then all four might be employed to produce a comprehensive account, but this is not allowable since it is evident at nearly every point where they do seem to cross each other's track one takes pains to modify or contradict the other in accordance with some necessity or bias of his own. Thus Matthew does not have the women visit the sepulcher with the intention of anointing Jesus' body, as in Mark, because that would be incompatible with the presence of the guard which Matthew alone has placed at the tomb; the command of the angel in Mark, calling to mind a prediction of Jesus to the effect that he would appear to the disciples in Galilee, becomes in Luke, inasmuch as the third evangelist has no room for Galilean appearances, merely a reminder of what Jesus had said about his resurrection when he was tarrying in Galilee; and the instance in which John and Matthew meet on common ground, where in the conversation with the women identity appears in the phrase "my brethren," shows that a prediction of a meeting in Galilee seemed less important to John than a reference to Jesus' immediately approaching ascension; and since John does not accept Luke's theory of waiting until Pentecost for the outpouring of the spirit, when he and Luke come together, the command of Jesus to the disciples to tarry in Jerusalem is displaced by a mention of the immediate giving of the spirit.

We have therefore to concede, concerning the gospel narratives of the post-resurrection appearances, that many of the descriptive details are not to be trusted, nor can any general theory of harmoniza-

tion be established. Furthermore, the more elaborate accounts do not generally present trustworthy supplementary materials, nor does any one evangelist seem to have had comprehensive information; and, finally, we recognize that each author took such liberties with the tradition as he thought necessary to make it consistent with his own view of what most probably happened. It is also quite conceivable that his pious purpose may have gone a step farther, leading him to bring out in strongest relief those points which he deemed of greatest consequence for the special exigencies of his own day. Hence in using the gospels in the present inquiry we are not at liberty to lay stress upon particulars, but we must be content with an undetailed summary of that which may properly be called gospel data in general. It may be briefly stated as follows:

1. In the first place, among the evangelists, the tradition of the empty tomb was commonly accepted, though there was disagreement as to the circumstances of its discovery.

2. But it was neither the report of the women nor a visit to the empty sepulcher that restored the disciples' faith. This fact is brought out least clearly in Matthew, but it is very evident in the fragment of Mark which ends by saying that the women kept silence. Luke and John distinctly emphasize the disciples' disbelief even after a visit to the tomb.

3. The initial factor in the revival of faith must therefore be assumed, according to gospel representation, to be some appearance of Jesus to the disciples. The exact time and circumstances of this first manifestation remain in obscurity. It is hinted that Peter's confidence was the first to be restored,<sup>32</sup> which agrees with Paul's statement.

4. From the very first there seem to have been those who were given to doubting,<sup>33</sup> hence the necessity of so framing the narrative as to convince the skeptical. This apologetic aim has colored almost the entire gospel picture, and is especially pronounced in Luke and John.

5. The gospels make no uniform and definite assertion regarding the nature of the visible risen Jesus, but a belief in the full reality

<sup>32</sup> Mark 16:7; Luke 24:34.

<sup>33</sup> Matt. 28:17; Luke 24:11, 25, 38, 41; John 20:25.

of his resurrection is assumed as fundamental to the beginning of the revived Christian faith.

We have examined the most trustworthy documentary sources. What have we learned? Two questions suggest the limits for a concluding summary: How did the disciples attain their new faith? and, What was its content? that is, What did they mean by the resurrection of Jesus? In the evolution of this new faith many elements were involved, and several individuals may have worked upon the problem. It is vain to hope to discover all the factors that contributed to the final solution; we shall be content with outlining the general trend of thought.

It is clear that the primitive Christians' belief in the resurrection was no mere pious invention of theirs. Their sincerity and constancy make absurd any hypothesis of pious fraud. They were as confident of his rising as they were of their own personal existence—a confidence which neither the terrors of persecution nor the dread of death could shake. Nor does it seem probable that they arrived at their assurance by mere deduction from the elements of their previous experience. It cannot be denied that they would pass through a season of searching recollection and deep reflection. The memory of Jesus' teaching, the abiding impression of his personality, and their hope that it was he who should have redeemed Israel must have occupied a large part of their thought as they endeavored to think their way into the light during the days of depression. But in every direction they were met by the blinding certainty that Jesus was dead. That they would evolve out of their reflections alone a new conviction which would triumph over the facts of their observation, and reverse their inherited ideas, seems highly improbable, especially when all available sources of information witness against this hypothesis. Not until they became conscious of the touch of some power beyond themselves did light break upon the darkness which at first surrounded them and give them the conviction that Jesus still lived. This certainty, as has already been observed, did not start from a sight of the empty tomb; its initial formative factor was credited to a vision of their living Lord.

What, in their opinion, had they seen? Was it a sight of their former teacher in his reanimated earthly body, or was his form angelic

and heavenly? Or was the appearance merely a spiritual reality which later description materialized and objectivized for the sake of making it more readily comprehensible? The supposition that Jesus' physical body was raised means, of course, that his resurrected body possessed the properties of a material substance, and consequently it would be assumed to be subject ordinarily to physical laws. At least this is the only test by which material existence can be proved. But the resurrected body of Jesus, as represented in the New Testament accounts, does not satisfy this test. Its material reality can be maintained only on the assumption of a perpetual miracle, which thus removes the entire vitality of the physical idea. And tradition has not emphasized the physical prowess of Jesus at any period in his career. While on earth his superior power was not of the physical sort, he was never a Samson or a Hercules, but his authority resided in the realm of the spirit; and after his death he does not return to the life he formerly lived among his disciples but appears in so strange a form that they recognize him with difficulty. He is pre-eminently a heavenly and not an earthly being. It may be urged, How could they see him if his body was not physical? But we may ask with equal right, How could he suddenly disappear from view if it were? Neither of these questions furnishes the key to the difficulty; they merely represent linguistic devices for emphasizing two ideas: the resurrection was real, and the risen Christ was not subject to the laws of the material world as he had been during his earthly career. But since there were then, as there doubtless always will be, some minds unable to conceive of reality apart from materiality, a certain degree of emphasis had to be placed on the sensuous in describing the event.

This tendency further developed as heresy demanded more stress upon the point. Heresy is usually, in its initial stages, an over-emphasis of some truth; and it, in turn, calls forth a wrong counter-emphasis on the part of orthodoxy. This principle has exerted its influence in the development of belief in Jesus' physical resurrection, and explains a few gospel passages that are particularly forceful. The earliest interpreters made no pronouncement upon the nature of the risen Lord's body—there was no demand that they should. On two points only they were clear: they were confident that he was



alive and that his resurrected life belonged to the heavenly and not to the earthly sphere. But when the Docetic heretics threatened to make Jesus' whole earthly existence a mere sham, such Christians as Ignatius (and the same polemic begins to appear in Luke and John) vigorously asserted the reality of his humanity, carrying it over even into the early part of his heavenly life.

If we have properly interpreted the content of the first disciples' faith, they believed the risen Jesus was heavenly, and appeared to men as a visible spirit in an ethereal body absolutely unencumbered by any of its former physical limitations. But even for them these visible manifestations were the unusual and extraordinary, and, while exceedingly helpful in strengthening faith, by no means conditioned the reality of Jesus' continued existence. Nor were the possibilities of communion with him restricted to these unusual experiences. As he lived on in the spirit world his touch made their hearts burn, and the fires of their spirit were kindled as they reflected upon his teaching and broke bread together in loving remembrance of their former common fellowship. To express the essential truth of their faith in more modern terms, Jesus' resurrection was the miraculous triumph of spirit personality over physical dissolution.